



# HR Highlights

## November 2001

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**D**ear Colleagues:

Welcome to November *Highlights*!

On September 28, 2001, as a result of the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon and the need to ensure that the Department has the necessary complement of employees to fulfill our primary mission of caring for veterans, we requested authority from the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) to delegate waiver authority to the Deputy Assistant Secretary for Human Resources Management to approve the reemployment of annuitants without a reduction in an individual's retirement annuity and to waive voluntary separation incentive repayment when the former employee is reemployed within 5 years. On October 31, 2001, OPM approved our request. We will be able to use the authority to support the temporary reemployment of former Federal employees to meet direct patient care, other medical services, claims adjudication, and support activities resulting from the present emergency. Further, the delegation will help us temporarily replace members of the National Guard and the reserves who are called to active duty. Regarding activation of VA employees who are reservists or members of the National Guard, as of November 6, 2001, 15,149 VA employees are reservists or National Guards and as of this writing, nearly 251 employees are serving on active duty. The predominant occupations affected are Police Officer, Nurse, Food Service Workers, Physicians, Chaplains, and Veterans Claims Examiner (or Veterans Services Representatives).

On a more somber note, we experienced a significant loss within the HR community and the VA family – the sudden passing of Mr. Jimmy Lee has left each of us saddened and without a devoted friend. We will miss him, tremendously!

To the employees of the New York Healthcare System and the VBA Regional Office, you are on our minds and in our hearts. Our hats are off to you for the sacrifice you have made in helping the State of New York and for ensuring that we continue meeting the needs of our Nation's veterans.

Ventris C. Gibson

# SENIOR EXECUTIVE SERVICE CANDIDATE DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

We announced the Department's Senior Executive Service Candidate Development Program (SESCDP). This opportunity is open until December 10, 2001, to all GS 14/15 civil service employees. The Secretary plans to select up to 20 candidates to participate in the program. SESCO's goal is to create an appointment-ready SES cadre in the Department. The training program lasts 12-18 months depending upon a selectee's Individual Development Plan and includes elements such as Orientation, IDP's details, mentoring and training. The application process is similar to other Civil Service jobs, although it differs in two important aspects. Individuals must sign a mobility agreement and submit first and second level supervisory appraisals. The skills, knowledge and abilities required are OPM's SES Executive Core Qualifications factors of leading change, leading people, results driven business acumen, and building coalitions. Once the vacancy announcement is posted, it can be found on OPM's website, [www.opm.gov](http://www.opm.gov).

**For additional service, call  
Joyce Mitchell at 202-273-9800**

Meet the Members of the Executive Resources Services Team! - (Back left to right)  
Angela Missouri, Angel Wolfrey, Joyce Mitchell, Charlotte Moment, Sue Ellen Scannell,  
Michelle Long, and  
Tressa Alfred (not shown)



# THE MOST AND LEAST IMPORTANT SKILLS AND ATTRIBUTES OF EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP

The Corporate Leadership Council based in Washington D.C., provides best practices research and executive education to human resources executives at leading global corporations. The Council undertakes several major research initiatives each year. The CLC stated “there are two issues that tenaciously remain at the top of the executive agenda, they are leadership and leadership development.” They conducted a quantitative analysis of leadership bench strength and development strategies and found:

1. More than 8,000 leaders report that people-management skills are the most important attributes of effective leadership, outranking strategic management, personal characteristics or day-to-day business management.
2. Many leadership teams are weakest in the skill areas that matter most, leading companies to look for solutions to the leadership development challenge.
3. Feedback and relationship programs are the most effective leadership development strategies.
4. Many organizations struggle to effectively implement the most important leadership development programs and would benefit by reallocating their development resources to meet leaders’ needs.
5. Organizations that successfully reallocate their development resources to meet leaders’ needs can measurably improve the strength of their leadership bench.
6. Companies with above-average leadership bench strength enjoy above-average 36-month growth relative to industry peer group.

The study also determined the ten most important skills and attributes of effective leadership as follows:

1. Honesty and integrity
2. Clearly communicate expectations
3. Recognize and reward achievement
4. Adapt to changing circumstances
5. Inspire others
6. Put the right people in the right roles at the right time
7. Passion to succeed
8. Identify and articulate long-term vision for future
9. Persuade and encourage others to move in desired direction
10. Accept responsibility for successes and failures

# LAUNCHING WORKFORCE AND SUCCESSION PLANNING SITE

The Office of Human Resources and Administration will be hosting VA's Next Generation Work Group from November 7-8, 2001. The purpose of the work group is to obtain the input of fresh, aspiring VA employees regarding their perspective of the recruitment, retention, and development issues that face the Department and how they would go about addressing these issues.

VA has an aging workforce, with almost 50 percent eligible to retire by 2005. There is a need to recruit younger and less experienced employees into the Department to ensure that there is a pipeline from the career entry-level through the journey level and beyond for our mission critical positions. The statistics indicate that our replacement pools are insufficient to ensure this necessary balance:

- ? In fiscal year 2000, only six percent of VA's employees were 31 years old and younger.
- ? In fiscal year 2000, less than 1 percent of our new hires were under age 35.
- ? In fiscal year 2000, only 5.2 percent of our new hires were under age 45.

To be a high performance organization, VA needs to establish a good balance of experienced and developing employees, and must therefore develop programs to attract young people and those who are new to Federal service. The members of the work group are currently being selected and will be notified shortly.

We are pleased to announce that on Friday, October 19, 2001, the Office of Human Resources Management, VA Central Office, launched its Workforce and Succession Planning web site which is now available to all VA employees.

The web site contains a number of exciting features. This includes numerous photographs of VA employees and a letter from Secretary Principi affirming his commitment that "VA employees are the foundation of the Department and the key to our success". You can read VA's Workforce Analysis and Restructuring Plan submitted to the Office of Management and Budget to see what workforce changes are expected over the next five years.

You can also research past and projected retirements for each VA position and the net change in total employment by position during the past three fiscal years. The site contains numerous resources and tools for staff who are interested in workforce and succession planning issues. It also contains information about the various workforce and succession planning initiatives of VA's administrations as well as several of its staff offices.

The web site can be accessed by the following link:  
<http://vaww.va.gov/vaworkforceplanning/>

**For additional service, call  
Joanna Hartis at 202-273-9839**



Meet the Office of Workforce Planning! (L to R): Tony Horty, Ernestine Blakemore, Mel Sessa (Director), Laura Shugrue, Joanna Hartis and John Puphal (not shown)

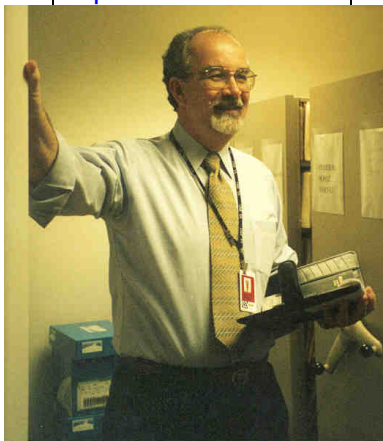


# Accessions and Separations Report for the Week Beginning 10/14/2001

\*Separations include the following breakouts

	Central Office	Field	Total
Accessions	10	682	692
Separations*	10	606	616

	Central Office	Field	Total
Retirements	3	83	86
Resignations	2	333	335
Terminations	3	166	169
Removals	1	17	18
Deaths	1	6	7
Separation-RI F	0	1	1
Separation - Totals	10	606	616



## OHRM Monthly Conference Call

Join the OHRM Monthly Conference Call on Wednesday, November 14th at 3:00 PM (EST). OHRM subject-matter experts will discuss topics of relevance. Mark your calendar and join us for some lively discussion.

**For additional service, call  
Ken Quantock, 202-273-9753**

## SPECIAL SALARY RATES FOR PHARMACISTS

Policy was recently revised to delegate increased authority to Medical Center Directors for setting Pharmacist special salary rates. Previously, Medical Center Directors could only set special rates for Pharmacists up to the 28<sup>th</sup> step of a grade. This limitation placed medical centers at a competitive disadvantage in many labor market areas due to increasing competition for qualified pharmacists, especially with retail establishments. Medical Center Directors can now set special rates above the 28<sup>th</sup> step of a grade, providing they do not exceed Level V of the Executive Schedule.

**For additional service, call  
Bill Ellison at 202-273-9841**

## SHARED SERVICE CENTER HIGHLIGHTS

The preliminary results are in from the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) audit of the Shared Service Center conducted the week of July 30 – August 3. Overall, the team was impressed by their findings at the SSC. They commented that coming to the SSC, they were a little concerned because they weren't sure what to expect – however they were pleasantly surprised. They were pleased with the quality and timeliness of work done by the SSC staff, the level of emphasis placed on accountability -- especially in the areas of personnel management and adherence to merit principles, and how the SSC consistently exceeded their performance standards in all areas of operation.

During their visit, OPM concentrated their review efforts heavily in the Staffing area. They found that the SSC does quite a few things well and correctly – such as meeting requirements for posting Wage Grade announcements, successfully providing solid staffing services to different VA locations that have a variety of different requirements, and establishing a good working relationship with VA field human resources offices. Improvement was needed in the areas of making best qualified determinations (an issue OPM is finding on a national level), ensuring documentation is in the merit promotions folders to provide for reconstruction of actions and ensuring job analysis documentation is always included in the merit promotion folders.

The OPM team was impressed by the call center and the volume of calls handled. Because they came during the last week of TSP Open Season, they were able to observe the call center priority system whereby additional staff logs on to answer calls when the call volume exceeds a certain level. During TSP Open Season, the SSC received over 77,000 calls. In Retirement and Classification, the team favorably noted that the SSC consistently exceeded its performance standards by a large margin – i.e., the Retirement section completes retirement estimates within the performance target 100% of the time, and the excellent turnaround times for the Classification staff to create & classify Position Descriptions for customers in the field. The team also commented that training takes a high priority at the SSC and extensive training is provided in all areas – staffing, classification, coding, and call center. They specifically noted new employee orientation and brown bag sessions for employees.

A key area the SSC needs to work on is improving its image/relationship with the VA employees. It was noted that field human resources and other VA staff perceive that the SSC is not doing a good job in meeting timelines or standards, even though OPM's review shows that we are consistently exceeding our performance standards. It was suggested that more work be done on marketing the SSC to its customers and developing a closer relationship with managers/employees through communication.

# FLEXIBILITIES FOR HIRING DURING A NATIONAL EMERGENCY

Temporary full-time appointments made under authority of 38 U.S.C., section 7405(a)(1) are appropriate when they are in the best interest of the service and as outlined in paragraph 2.24 of VHA Supplement to MP-5, part II, chapter 2. Examples of appropriate circumstances include employing individuals in occupations identified in sections 7401(1) and 7401(3) when the work to be performed by the employee is of a temporary nature and can be completed within a 3-year or shorter period; to reemploy annuitants; to employ noncitizens when qualified citizens are not available, etc.

- Temporary full-time appointments of medical support personnel may be made under authority of 38 U.S.C., section 7405(a)(1) for a period not-to-exceed 3 years. These appointments may be renewed for one or more additional periods not in excess of 3 years each. (See paragraph 2.31 of VHA Supplement to MP-5, part II, chapter 2 and VHA Notice 05-2001-01, dated May 21, 2001)

- Fee basis appointments under 38 U.S.C. section 7405(a)(2) may be appropriate if the employee is to be compensated by the task or service (i.e., by piecework). Examples of appropriate fee basis appointments include: members of clergy paid by religious service or health care practitioners paid by specifically identified medical or surgical procedures.(See paragraph 2.28 of VHA Supplement to MP-5, part II, chapter 2)

- Emergency appointments may be made in exceptional circumstances and where required to meet an emergent patient care situation. In such situations, the facility Director may approve the temporary appointment of a physician, dentist, podiatrist or optometrist under 38 U.S.C. 7405 without prior action by a Professional Standards Board. The Director will document for the record the specific circumstances and patient care situation which warranted such an appointment. The appointment will be made only after evidence of current, full and unrestricted State licensure has been obtained, and a judgment has been made that the individual is fully qualified for the assignment. (See paragraph 2.43c(2) of VHA Supplement to MP-5, part II, chapter 2).

**For additional service, call  
Elizabeth Lanier at 202-273-9818**

# KUDOS TO THE SHARED SERVICE CENTER!

It has been nearly a year since the VCS and SSC entered into our partnership for processing Payroll Deduction Voluntary Allotments and responsibility for these transactions was moved from station level payroll offices to the SSC. As we approach this "First Anniversary" I wanted to express our **APPRECIATION** for the **OUTSTANDING** job done by the SSC Payroll staff in accomplishing what has truly become a monumental task. Many superlatives come to mind in thinking of that group and what they have accomplished; hard work, dedication, service minded people, people on a mission, and there is no doubt that **SERVICE** is a justified part of your organizational title.

When we began in December 2000, new allotments were being created at the rate of about 400 per day. A significant number when you realize that it happened day and day, but far below what we do now. While we anticipated some growth because of changes in the program, we had no idea of what actually lay immediately ahead. The norm today is nearly 1,000 transactions per day and we expect that pre-Christmas could be 1,500. While that nearly 3 fold increase may have put lesser offices into turmoil, yours not only took it in stride, but they accomplished it as routinely as if they had been doing it all along. In the past 11 months they have created 170,000 allotment transactions with a value of nearly \$24,000,000. Simultaneously they cancelled many thousands of allotments as our customers completed payment for their purchases. All with a very HIGH degree of accuracy and more timely by far than what we had ever previously experienced.

In my view Angela Curtis is the catalyst for the group and she provides excellent leadership to a staff that quite obviously functions with a high level of self motivation and service minded enthusiasm. Thanks to the involvement of these people in getting our allotment transactions input both accurately and promptly, we are able to discover and correct errors made at the VCS level before they become a problem. Because the SSC is able to identify to us customers that have not made a payment simply because they are on long term leave or did not have sufficient pay, we are able to separate them from those that have departed the VA and thus keep on records on this multi million dollar accounts receivable both accurate and up to date.

In summary, the move to the SSC has been one of the best things to happen to the VCS Payroll Deduction Program and I hope that this message at least partially conveys the appreciation we at VCS have as a result.

***OUR SINCEREST THANKS FOR A JOB WELL DONE.***

***A. J. Austermann***

Chief Financial Officer  
Veterans Canteen Service